

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 SSO-00 ISO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O P 151205Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5567

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL ASMARA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY

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DEPARTMENT PASS USCINCEUR

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, ET, US

SUBJECT: KAGNEW FOUR

REF: (A) STATE 244073; (B) LONDON 15801

1. DEPARTMENT PLEASE REPEAT REFTTEL (B) TO USCINCEUR FOR INFO.

2. WHILE MOST OF QUESTIONS SUGGESTED PARA 6 REFTTEL (A) WERE ANSWERED IN REFTTEL (B), BELIEVE FOLLOWING ADDENDA MAY BE PERTINENT AND OF INTEREST.

3. IN HIS COLVERSATION WITH US, ROBERTS MADE NO SECRET OF HIS SYMPATHY FOR ERITREANS AND DISTASTE WITH ALLEGED EXCESSES OF EPMG FORCES. DESPITE THIS ERITREAN "TILT,"

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HOWEVER, ROBEPTS APPEARED GENUINELY AND SINCERELY CONCERN-

ED FOR WELFARE OF KAGNEW FOUR. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AS A JOURNALIST, HE WAS "MAKING MONEY FROM THEIR PREDICAMENT," BUT SAID THAT HE WANTED TO HELP THEM AS INDIVIDUALS IF HE POSSIBLY COULD. WE BELIEVE THAT ROBERTS' SUGGESTIONS AND OFFER TO ASSIST WITH SHIPMENT OF FOOD AND MEDICINES TO CAPTIVES ARE BASED ON A COMBINATION OF HUMANITARIAN CONCERN AND AFFECTION FOR THE MEN WITH WHOM HE SPENT CONSIDERABLE TIME, COUPLED PERHAPS WITH A DESIRE TO "PAY" IN SOME WAY FOR HIS PROFESSIONAL EXPLOITATION OF THEIR PLIGHT. IN ANY EVENT, WE BELIEVE HIS OFFER IS SPONTANEOUS AND SINCERE, AND WE DO NOT FEEL THAT HE WAS SENT BY OR IS ACTING ON BEHALF OF THE ELF.

4. AT "BASE AREA" MEETINGS, BOWIDOWICZ AND STRICKLAND TOLD ROBERTS THAT DURING THEIR MARCH FROM ASMARA, SEVERAL VILLAGES THROUGH WHICH THEY PASSED WERE ATTACKED BY EPMG AIRCRAFT SHORTLY FOLLOWING THEIR DEPARTURE. THIS INDICATED TO CAPTIVES AND TO ELF THAT EPMG WAS PRESUMABLY AWARE OF THEIR PRESENCE FROM INFORMERS, BUT HAD NO CONCERN FOR THEIR SAFETY. INDEED, ELF SUGGESTED THAT EPMG WOULD BE JUST AS HAPPY IF CAPTIVES WERE KILLED IN ATTACKS, AS THEIR DEATHS COULD THEN BE BLAMED ON ELF "TERRORISTS."

5. ROBERTS DID NOT HAVE IMPRESSION THAT BOWIDOWICZ AND STRICKLAND WERE UNDER DURESS WHEN HE SPOKE WITH THEM. WHILE MEN WERE INDISPUTABLY UNWILLING PRISONERS, THEY SEEMED TO BE ON FAIRLY GOOD PERSONAL TERMS WITH THEIR CAPTORS, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. AS NOTED IN "FINANCIAL TIMES" ARTICLE AND REFTEL (B) CONVERSATION, ROBERTS FELT THAT ELF WAS MAKING DEFINITE EFFORT TO TREAT CAPTIVES AS WELL AS CIRCUMSTANCES PERMITTED. THEIR RATIONS WERE OFTEN BETTER THAN THOSE OF ELF GUERRILLAS (ALTHOUGH STILL FAR FROM SATISFACTORY IN WESTERN TERMS), THEY WERE TRANSPORTED BY TRUCK WHEN SUCH WAS AVAILABLE, ETC.

6. WHILE SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDING ANY SUGGESTION OF RANSOMING CAPTIVES, ROBERTS NOTED THAT HE BELIEVED ELF LEADERSHIP WAS VERY CONCERNED BY CONDITION OF ERITREAN REFUGEES ON SUDANESE SIDE OF BORDER. STRESSING HE WAS EXPRESSING PERSONAL VIEW, HE SUGGESTED THAT IF ANY IMPROVEMENT COULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BE MADE IN REFUGEE CAMPS AT U.S. INITIATIVE, SUCH INITIATIVE MIGHT BE TAKEN AS "POSITIVE SIGN" BY ELF.

7. ROBERTS REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT AS IN CASE OF SO MANY GUERRILLA MOVEMENTS, THERE WAS OFTEN WIDE GULF BETWEEN ELF LEADERSHIP IN EXILE AND COMMANDERS IN THE FIELD.

RICHARDSON

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED USCINCEUR.

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